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(Continued.)

Ishmael struck him across the mouth, exclaiming: "Be silent, you accursed wizard, or you shall howl louder than your ghost-dog."

"I meant no harm," answered the man humbly, but with a curious gleam in his eye. "What are your commands, Chief?"

"That we watch here. I think that the daughter of the Shouter, she who is called Inkosazana-y-Zoola, is coming, and she may need help. Have you brought thirty men with you as I bade you through my messenger?"

"Aye, Tumbosa, they are all hidden in the bush. I will summon them, though I think that the mighty Inkosazana, who can command all the Zulu impis and all the spirits of the dead, will need little help from us."

CAPTER XV.
Rachel Comes Home.

As Rachel had travelled up from the Tugela to the Great Place, so she travelled back from the Great Place to the Tugela in state and dignity such as became a thing divine, perhaps the first white woman, moreover, who had ever entered Zululand. All day she rode alone, Tamboosa leading the white ox before her and Richard following behind, while in front and to the rear marched the serried ranks of the impi, her escort. At night, as before, she slept alone in the empty kraals provided for her, attended by their best-born maidens, Richard being lodged in some hut without the fence. So at length, about noon one day, they reached the banks of the Tugela, not many hours after Ishmael had crossed it, and camped there. Now, after she had eaten Rachel sent for Richard, with whom she had found but few opportunities to talk during that journey. He came and stood before her, as all must do, and she addressed him in English, which he spoke well. "Well enough," he answered. "And now, what are your plans? The river is in flood, you will find it difficult to cross. Still it must be done, for I know that the white man, Ishmael, of whom you told me, forced it this morning with a company of armed men. I am aware of the eyes that watched her, with an effort Rachel showed no surprise.

"How is that?" she asked. "I thought the man from Zululand had been here days ago. Why then does he leave the country with soldiers?"

"I can't tell you, Rachel. There is something queer about the business. When I inquire everyone shrugs his shoulders. They say that the King knows his own business. If I were you I would ask no questions, you will learn nothing, and if you do not ask they will think that you know all."

"I understand," she said. "But Richard, I must cross the river, for I must reach Ramah to-night. Richard, something weighs upon my heart. I am terribly afraid."

"How will you manage it?" he asked, ignoring the rest.

"I can't tell you, Richard, but keep my horse and yours saddled there where you are encamped," and she nodded towards a hut about fifty yards away. "I think that I shall come to you presently. No go."

So he saluted her and went. Presently Rachel sent for Tamboosa, the captain, and asked him to lead her to the kraal which was out of sight about half a mile from them. They replied that it was "very angry," none could think of yesterday's message, as much water was coming down.

"Is it so?" she said indifferently. "Well, I must look," and with slow steps she walked where the spies and the horses were, followed by Tamboosa and the captains.

Reaching it, she saw them standing saddled on their horses, and she saw them Richard, seated on the ground smoking. As she came he rose and saluted her, but taking no heed of him, she went to her grey mare, and placing her foot in the stirrup, sprang to the saddle, motioning to him to do likewise.

"Whether goest thou, Inkosazana?" asked Tamboosa anxiously.

"To throw a charm on the waters," she answered, "so that they may run down and I can cross them to-morrow. Come, Dario, and come Tamboosa, but let the rest stay behind, since common eyes must not look upon my magic, and he who dares to look shall be struck with blindness."

The captains hesitated, and turning on them fiercely, she commanded them to obey her word lest some evil should befall them.

"Then they fell back and she rode towards the Tugela, followed by Richard on horseback and Tamboosa on foot. Arrived at that spot upon the bank where she had received the salutation of the regiment, she crossed the river. Rachel saw at once that although the great river was full it could easily be forded on horseback. Calling Richard to her side, she said:

"We must go, and now, while there is no one to stop us but Tamboosa. Do not hurt him unless he tries to speak to you, for he has been kind to me."

Then she addressed Tamboosa, saying: "I have spoken to the waters and they will not harm me. The hour has come when I must leave my people for a while, and go forward alone with my white servant, and I have given you my commands, that none should dare to follow me save only yourself, Tamboosa, who can be trusted as the water has run down and deliver them to me at Ramah. Do you hear me?"

"I hear, Inkosazana," answered the old induna, "and thy words split my heart."

"Yet you will obey them, Tamboosa."

"Yes, I will obey them who know

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what would befall me otherwise, and that it is the King's will that none should dare to thwart them, even if they could. Yet I think that very soon thou wilt return to thy children. Therefore, why not abide with us until to-morrow, when the waters will be low?"

"Tamboosa," said Rachel, leaning forward and looking him in the eyes, "why did Tumbosa cross this river with soldiers but a few hours ago—Tumbosa, who fled from the Great Place when the moon was young that now is full? Look there goes their spoor in the mud."

"I know not," he answered, looking down. Inkosazana, to-morrow I will bring on the white ox to Ramah, and I will bring it alone."

"So be it, Tamboosa, but if by chance you should not find me, ask where Tumbosa is, and if need be, seek for me with an impi, Tamboosa—for me and for this white man, Dario," and again she bent forward and looked at him.

"I know not what thou meanest, Inkosazana," he replied. "But of this be sure, that if I cannot find thee, then I will seek of thee if need be, with every spear in Zululand at my back."

"Farewell, then, Tamboosa, and to the regiment farewell also. Say to the captains that it is my wish that they should return to the Great Place, bearing my greetings to the King and those of the white lord, Dario. Look for me to-morrow at Ramah."

Then, followed by Richard, she rode her horse past him into the lip of the water. As she went Tamboosa drew himself up and gave her the Bayete, the royal salute.

Although it was red with earth and decked with foam and the roar of it was deafening, it seemed to her that the river did not prove very difficult to ford. But once, indeed, were the horses swept off their feet and forced to wade, and then they regained them and plunged to the further bank without accident.

Free at last, Rachel, with our lives before us and nothing more to fear," called Richard in his cheery voice, as he forced his horse alongside of hers. "I have been so long among those Zulus playing the part of a spirit that I begin to think I am one, or that their magic has got hold of me. I tell you that in the roar of the water I heard voices—the voices of my father and mother calling me and speaking of you, and that they seemed to be in great fear and pain. For a minute or more I heard them, then a dreadful cold wind blew on me—not this wind, it came from above, and I saw everything passed away, leaving my mind dumb and empty so that I do not remember how we came out of the river. But I am sure, Richard, it is so. The Kafirs are right; I have some power of the sort. Remember how I saw you travelling towards me in a dream?"

"Why should I laugh at you, dearest?" he asked anxiously, for something of this uncanny fear passed from Richard to her. "I don't laugh, you know that you are not quite like other women. But, Rachel, the strain of those two months has worn you out, and now the reaction is too much. Perhaps it is nothing."

"Perhaps," she answered sadly. "I hope so, Richard, what is the time?"

"About a quarter to six, to judge by the sun," he answered.

"That was what I was able to reach Ramah before dark."

"No, Rachel, but there is a good moon."

"Yes, there is a good moon; I wonder what it will show us," and she shivered.

Then they pressed their horses to a canter and rode on, speaking little, for the sound of voices seemed to be in the air, although Richard recollected with a curious sense of wonder how he had looked forward to this opportunity of long and unfeigned talk with Rachel and how much he had to tell her. Over hill and valley, through bush and stream they rode, till at last with the short twilight they reached the plain that ran to Ramah. Then came the dark in which they must ride slowly, till presently the round edge of the moon showed itself up above the shoulder of a hill and there was light again—pure, peaceful light that turned the veils to silver and shone whitely on the pale face of Rachel.

Ramah was before them. They had met no living thing save some wild game trekking to the water, and heard no sound save the distant roar of some beast of prey. Ramah was before them. The moon shone on the roofs of the Mission-house and the little church and the clusters of Kaffir huts beyond. But, oh! it was silent; no cattle lowed, no child cried, nor did the bell of the church ring for evening prayer as at this hour it should have done. Also no lamp showed in the windows of the Mission-house and no smoke rose from the cooking fires of the kraals.

"Where are all the people, Richard?" whispered Rachel. "There is the place where the people are, but where are the people?"

But Richard could only shake his head; the terror of something dreadful had got hold of him also, and he knew not what to say.

Now they had come to the wall of the Mission-house and sprang from their horses which they left loose. As they advanced side by side towards the open gate, something leapt from the stoep and rushed through it. It was a striped hyena, a creature of the night, and it leapt upon them with a whining growl. Hand in hand they ran to the house across the little garden patch—Rachel, led by some instinct, guiding her companion straight to her parents' room whereof the windows, that opened like doors, stood wide as the gates had done.

One more moment and they were there; another, and the moonlight showed them all.

For a long while to Richard it seemed hours—Rachel said nothing; only stood still like the statue of a woman, staring at those cold faces that looked back at her through the unearthly moonlight. Indeed, it was Richard who spoke first, feeling that if he did not this dreadful silence would choke him or cause him to faint.

"The Zulus have murdered them," he said hoarsely, glancing at the dead hair on the floor.

"No," she answered in a cold, small voice; "Ishmael, Ishmael!" and she pointed to something that lay at his feet.

Richard stooped and picked it up. It was a fly-wisp made of the tip of an elephant's tail shrunk on a handle of rhinoceros horn which the man had let fall when the Zulu's spear struck him.

"I know it," she went on; "he always carried it. He is the real murderer. The Zulus would not have dared," and she choked and was silent.

"Let me think," said Richard confusedly. "There is something in my mind. What is it? Oh! I know. If you are right that devil has not done this for nothing. He is somewhere near; he wants to take you," and he ground his teeth at the thought, then

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added: "Rachel, we must get out of this and ride for Durban, at once—at once; the white people will protect you then."

"Who will bury my father and mother?" she asked in the same cold voice. "I do not know, it does not matter, the living are more than the dead. I can return and see to it afterwards."

"You are right," she answered. Then she knelt down by the bed and lifting her beautiful face, agonized face, put some silent prayer. Next she rose and kissed first her father, then her mother, kissed their dead brows in a last farewell and turned to go. As she went her eye fell upon the assegai that lay near to the dead Zulu. Stooping down, she took it and with it in her hand passed on to the stoep. Here her strength seemed to fail her, for she reeled against the wall, then with an effort flung herself into Richard's arms, moaning:

"Only you left, Richard, only you. Oh! if you were taken from me also, what would become of me?"

A moment later she became aware that the stoep was swarming with men who seemed to arise out of the shadows. A voice said in the Kaffir tongue:

"Seize that white fellow and bind him."

Instantly, before he could do anything, before he could even turn, Richard was torn from her, struggling furiously, and thrown to the ground. Rachel sprang to the wall and stood with her back to it, raising the spear she held. It flashed into her mind that these were Zulus, and of Zulus she was not afraid.

"What dogs are these?" she cried, "that dare to lift a hand against the Inkosazana and her servant?"

The black men about her swayed and murmured, then made way for a man who walked up the steps of the stoep. The moonlight fell upon him and she saw that it was Ishmael.

"Rachel," he said, taking off his hat politely, "these are my people. We saw that white scoundrel assault you, and of course seized him at once. As you know, a dreadful thing has happened here. This afternoon the Zulus killed your father and mother, or rather, they killed your father, and your mother, who was ill, died of the shock, because they refused to go to Zululand whither Dingaan had ordered that they should be taken. So seeing that we were traveling here I came to rescue you, lest you should fall into their hands, and," he added lamely, "you know the rest."

Ishmael had spoken in English, but Rachel answered him in Zulu.

"I know all, Night-prowler," she cried aloud, "I know that your father and mother were killed by your order, and in your presence; their spirits told me so but now, and for that crime I sentence this man to death," and she pointed at him with the spear. "Heaven above and earth beneath," she went on, "bear witness that I sentence this man to death. People of the Zulus, hear me in your kraals far away. Hear me, Dingaan, sitting in your Great Place. Hear me, every captain and induna, the chief of your Inkosazana. I sentence this man to death, since because of him there is blood between me and my people, the blood of my father and my mother. Now, Night-prowler, do your worst before you die, but know this, you his servants, that if I am harmed, or if this white man, the chief Dario, is harmed, then you shall die also, every one of you. What is your will, Night-prowler?"

"I will tell you that at Mafooti," answered Ishmael, trying to look bold, "I am not afraid of you like those Zulu savages and Dingaan is a long way off. I will tell you that at Mafooti, I don't want to hurt you or put you to shame, but you've got to come, and this Dario, too. If you make any trouble, I will have him killed at once. Understand, Rachel, that if you don't come, he shall be killed at once. My people may be afraid of you, but they won't mind cutting his throat," he added significantly.

"Never mind about me," said Richard in a choked voice from the ground where he lay, "I have been killed at once. Understand, Rachel, that if you don't come, he shall be killed at once. My people may be afraid of you, but they won't mind cutting his throat," he added significantly.

"Do what you think best for yourself, Rachel."

(To be Continued.)

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